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ABSTRACT

This paper establishes a rationale for international public relations courses in the curricula of university public relations education in the U.S. and outlines the content of such courses. Disagreements between practitioners and educators on a blueprint for public relations education are documented. Developments pointing to a crucial need for expanded U.S. public relations curricula are noted, such as increasing capabilities of satellite communication and the increasingly transnational nature of business. Public relations curricula should include international courses at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. International public relations courses should address: (1) the history and development of public relations in other cultures; (2) the practice and function of public relations abroad, emphasizing differences between U.S. and non-U.S. practices; (3) the internal and external dynamics of multinational corporations as well as the problems and difficulties of U.S. corporate public relations abroad; (4) comparative legal, political, and ethical dimensions of public relations practice at home and abroad; (5) the history, organization, practice, and professional operations of the media abroad; (6) public relations aspects of major international political, diplomatic, cultural, and socioeconomic developments; and (7) the various international organizations that provide resources for public relations practitioners. (Contains approximately 65 references.) (JDD)

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U.S. Public Relations from an International Perspective: Curricular Issues and Objectives

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**U.S. Public Relations from an International Perspective:
Curricular Issues and Objectives**

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ABSTRACT

Recent global developments point to a crucial need for expanded U.S. public relations curricula. Some of these developments are the pervasiveness of technologies for use in public relations, particularly the increasing capabilities of satellite communication; the increasingly transnational nature of business; the restructuring of the European Economic Community in 1991; the fast-changing political structure, particularly in Eastern Europe.

Are public relations practitioners, educators, and students up to the challenge? Students—tomorrow's practitioners—need to be equipped with a broad knowledge of the world. For public relations students, this requires a study of the history, developments and public relations practices, not just in the United States, but in other societies as well. A number of U.S. programs are restructuring their offerings in the hopes of addressing just these needs. This paper argues that they would do well to better prepare public relations students for complex and rapidly changing international business and governmental environments by offering courses in international public relations in their programs.

**U.S. Public Relations from an International Perspective:
Curricular Issues and Objectives**

. . . [T]he professional worldwide public relations executive must understand global cultures if he or she is going to play a significant role in future business and government decisions.

If . . . students get some global knowledge and experience, they will set themselves apart, and it will give them a much more effective résumé when they go job hunting.

Donald G. Dowd, president of Dan Dowd Communications, Chicago, in an address to students at Michigan State University

The preceding views, even though expressed more than a decade ago, stand the test of time for two key reasons: they highlight the significance of global perspectives to U.S. public relations education and of the typical "stateless" corporation to the competitive marketplace—both then and now. The purpose of this paper, therefore, is to establish a rationale for international public relations courses in the curricula of university public relations education in the United States and to outline the content of such courses.

The rest of the 20th century will indeed pose continuing economic and social challenges to public relations practitioners worldwide. These challenges will be dictated by many reasons: (1) the liberalization movements in Europe and the demise of the cold war; (2) the political and economic reforms that indicate

the supplanting of geopolitics by gaiapolitics, a worldwide movement to restore and protect the biosphere; (3) the growth of international "non-place" communities; (4) changes in technology; (5) increases in cross-cultural communications; and (6) the explosion in information (Frederick, 1993). An additional factor that, to a large degree, redefines the organizational environments within which practitioners interact is the increasing internationalization of production and marketing processes by which products are designed in one place, their components are shipped from a number of places, and their marketing strategies are directed from a number of countries simultaneously.

To meet these challenges, this paper outlines, primarily from U.S. perspectives, curricular issues in education for international public relations. The international dimension of public relations practice aside, curricular issues in general often pit educators against practitioners. As Schwartz and Yarbrough (1992) noted from their survey of practitioners, "While public relations programs are offered at more than 200 U.S. universities, there's still ambivalence among practitioners about their quality and curriculum content" (p. 19). Even within journalism and mass communication programs in which public relations curricula tend to be housed, questions have been raised about whether such an administrative structure fosters the academic and professional stature of the practice (Falb, 1992). There are at least three reasons for both these perceptions.

First, practitioners argue that faculty members who teach public relations tend to be too theoretical and fail to bring "real-world" experiences to the classroom. However, as German philosopher Kant (1974) argues, a broad-based theory is a guide to action, suggesting the inherent practical and real-world characteristic of theories. The reality, however, is that both practitioners and educators tend not apply theories to the teaching or practice of public relations, as Botan (1989) explains:

. . . public relations practitioners, and even scholars, have generally limited themselves to questions of how-to-do-it and how-to-do-it-better. With a few notable exceptions, public relations has not systematically addressed the development of theory or the relationship of practice to research and theory building. (p. 100)

Second, educators bemoan the atheoretical nature of public relations education, which is usually handled as if it were an art or craft bereft of an applied scientific framework.

The third reason, which balances the two preceding reasons, is based on the question: to what extent is public relations education meeting marketplace demands? All these reasons reflect some of the disagreement between practitioners and educators on a blueprint for public relations education.

These issues were so critical that the Board of Trustees of the Institute for Public Relations Research and Education

requested a few years ago that two widely known public relations educators—Donald K. Wright, APR; and Judy VanSlyke Turk, APR—examine the unpleasant issues in public relations education. Their report noted:

Some of the practitioner criticism probably is justified. There are some university-based public relations programs that are truly terrible. There are some places where the public relations faculty never have published refereed scholarship, and there are institutions who have hired incompetents to teach public relations. (Wright & Turk, 1990, p. 12)

This view is telling, primarily because, at least a decade before the report was published, the very same foundation that sponsored the study had published at least two extensive reports on the same subject. One report, titled "A Design for Public Relations Education," recommended curricula for undergraduate, master's and doctoral programs in public relations ("A Design," 1975). A second report, published 10 years later, focused on graduate-level offerings ("National Commission," 1985).

The earlier report recommends that, at the master's level, curricula address the comparative study of mass media practices in the United States and other nations. The latter alludes to that same direction by recommending a "Public Relations Specialty Option" at the master's level. Even so, only a handful of colleges or universities have free-standing courses in international public relations to which are committed adequate

resources for teaching and research in that area.

Other curricular issues in U.S. higher education

Study after study has identified a litany of other issues in U.S. public relations education. Such studies have reported that the teaching of public relations has not included the role of women and racial minorities in the history and the development of the discipline (Creedon, 1989; Kern-Foxworth, 1980; 1990; 1991). Another has observed a gender gap in college programs in public relations (Hunt & Thompson, 1988) and also that, even though women account for 70 percent of undergraduate public relations majors, few women are involved in public relations instruction at U.S. universities and colleges (Lance, 1986).

A number of studies have observed that a majority of public relations practitioners are women (e.g., Dozier, 1988; Hon, Grunig, & Dozier, 1992). At the college level, white females account for more than twice the public relations enrollment, a trend expected to continue (Peterson, 1988). Despite this, Lance (1988) noted that women are hardly involved in public relations education.

Another problem is that public relations is perceived as a "velvet ghetto," a term that describes the hiring of women primarily to fulfill affirmative-action requirements.

Still other studies have pointed to the inadequacy of current public relations curricula in meeting student, practitioner and academic needs (Brody, 1985a, 1985b, 1991).

Dramatic changes in society and technology suggest new curricula and strategies to deal with new challenges in public relations (Sharpe, 1985, 1992; Grunig, 1985). Further, Ogan and Brownlee (1986) and Paraschos (1980) have called for education in international journalism. And, interestingly, the International Division of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC) has indicated interest in how international topics are treated in journalism textbooks and in college curricula. Even with such stated interest in internationalizing communication curricula, in a recent survey of practitioners' ratings of curriculum content for undergraduate public relations education, international business trends were rated least frequently in the quite-or-very-important category in terms of course emphasis (Schwartz & Yarbrough, 1992).

Interest in public relations as a college major

Among U.S. baccalaureate programs in communication, the public relations program is growing most rapidly. Since 1923, when Edward L. Bernays taught the first college-level course in public relations at New York University, there has been phenomenal growth in offerings. In 1945, for example, Lee (1947) reported that 21 colleges offered courses in public relations. In 1947, that number had increased to at least 30.

According to PR Reporter, by 1977, 130 schools offered a major in public relations, and 162 other schools offered at least one public relations course by that year (Baxter, 1981). Today,

almost every U.S. university that offers a degree program in journalism or in the broader field of mass communication offers a public relations major or minor.

The precise number of schools offering graduate programs in public relations is not known. But, since 1947, when the first master's program in the field was established at Boston University, the number of institutions offering graduate-level programs in the discipline has risen. That number was 51 by 1981 (Hesse, 1984). Today, a number of schools that offer graduate programs in public relations package them within a standard journalism degree, with a smattering of public relations courses that, for the most part, are the same as those offered at the undergraduate level (Sharpe, 1985).

As the public relations practice matures, a legitimate concern arises regarding curriculum and the education of the men and women entering the practice. Consequently, efforts are being made to address those concerns.

In 1973, for example, the public relations division of the Association for Education in Journalism (AEJ, now AEJMC) established a commission to examine the public relations curriculum and make recommendations on how it could be improved. The result was a report issued by the late J. Carroll Bateman, a former president of the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), and Scott Cutlip, a former dean of the School of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Georgia. The report, titled "A Design for Public Relations Education," was

adopted by AEJ in August 1975 and approved in November 1975 by the National Board of PRSA.

Another committee, the Commission on Graduate Study in Public Relations, was established in August 1982 by the Public Relations Division of AEJMC to evaluate the public relations curriculum at the graduate level and to design a model graduate curriculum. The commission completed its work in August 1983. The resulting report, which projected perceived needs of students and public relations practitioners, recommended, among other things, that students working toward graduate degrees in public relations complete—at the minimum—30 semester hours in courses such as research methods, communication theory, public relations management, programming and production ("National Commission," 1985). These courses are similar to those required for a master's degree in public relations at Salzburg University, Austria.¹

For some colleges and universities, curricular concerns have gone beyond merely meeting accreditation requirements of the Accrediting Council of AEJMC. There is now an additional interest in meeting certification requirements of PRSA. Brigham Young University was the first university in the United States to have its public relations program certified. These certification programs are testimonials to educators' willingness to have their curricula, among other things, reviewed independently by their peers. Such curricula are designed to equip students with knowledge and skills for the increasingly changing currents of

international competition. That is why we believe any curriculum that excludes international public relations courses is ineffective in addressing student and practitioner needs, particularly in the next century.

Justifying courses in international public relations

An analysis of events, trends and developments in 1989 indicated that "a combination of shocks and surprises thrust the PR function onto the global scene" (Public Relations News, 1990a). The PR Exchange International, a worldwide network of 38 public relations firms, forecasts that one major trend within public relations in the 1990s will be "localized globalization," which will require understanding of international marketing by small businesses (Public Relations News, 1990b).

Among public relations firms, the growing use of international network affiliates like the Pinnacle Group, the International Public Relations Group of Companies, and the Worldcom Group, all of which localize communications and marketing programs requires "that U.S. transnational marketers recognize the importance of local nationalism, customs, languages and press relations techniques before embarking on an overseas public relations campaign" (Strenski, 1985, p. 29).

The views of economists, academicians, chief executive officers (CEOs), and public relations practitioners on the climate of uncertainties in the 1990s indicates that public relations would advance worldwide at a pace that would have

seemed impossible only a few short months ago (Public Relations News, 1990c).

In the January 1990 issue of Public Relations Journal, 15 CEOs and top public relations practitioners expressed their views on "What's Ahead in the 1990s" for public relations. Four of them clearly identified international public relations as one such possible trend.

The need for courses in international public relations is further justified by the increasing representation of countries by U.S. public relations firms, and by the increasing evidence of the effects of such representation on client images (Albritton & Manheim, 1983, 1985; Manheim and Albritton, 1984). Between 1967 and 1970, for example, U.S. firms represented the Federal Military Government of Nigeria and secessionist Biafra in their efforts to win international understanding and support for their activities in the 30-month Nigerian civil war.² In 1978, 50 countries were represented by U.S. public relations firms, largely for tourism, trade, investments, industrial development and image building. That number doubled by 1984 (Lobsenz, 1984).

These developments require ongoing, in-depth training of professionals who represent a variety of countries and firms abroad. Such training should be sufficiently broad to equip practitioners with knowledge not only of the geography but also of the gaiapolitical factors (that is, the coalescence of movements directed at protecting the biosphere) and of socioeconomic and cultural milieus of major world regions. It is

also important that practitioners demonstrate in-depth awareness of the politics of ethnicity and religion and the cultural dichotomies of the major countries with which U.S. public relations firms do business. However, the public relations industry has not adapted to the increasing globalization of the industry itself and of communications (Farinelli, 1990).

Responses from a random sample of 123 executives in U.S. firms provide at least three reasons for this failure (Tung & Miller, 1990). First, more than 93% of the executives did not consider "international experience or perspective" as a criterion for promotion or recruitment into the ranks of senior management. Second, about 10% of respondents in companies that provided training programs to groom their candidates for top management positions thought that such programs emphasized the international perspective. Third, among seven factors, no respondent identified "increase international market share" as a criterion for determining the size of an incentive package to retain personnel at the senior management level.

Yet, globalization of the U.S. economy challenges business and educational institutions to develop new skills, knowledge and insights. Business leaders need to know more about other cultures and value systems, other political and legal structures, and the philosophical and practical dimensions of other national economic systems. Formal education—including course work in international business, international relations, foreign language and area studies—can help students learn about other cultures

(Tung & Miller, 1990, p. 9). Singer (1987) satirizes the inadequacy of the foreign-language skills of U.S. nationals:

"What do you call a person who can speak two languages?

"Bilingual.

"How about three?

"Trilingual.

"How about one language?

"American" (p. 35).

Many Western companies such as the Toronto-based telecommunications giant, Northern Telecomm, now send their staff people on overseas tours to prepare them for global business challenges. Others organize one- or two-week courses in public relations practices and customs abroad for their corporate communications staffs. Others have their staffs take, on college campuses, courses on international business practices. Even though such programs help prepare participants to deal with language and communication challenges, there is evidence that their effectiveness is limited (Wilcox, Ault, & Agee, 1992). As David Potts, a public relations counselor in Sydney, Australia, said, "Some overseas corporations . . . make the mistake of assuming that public relations styles and campaigns which have worked overseas, particularly in the U.S.A., will work [domestically]. They don't always" (Wilcox, Ault, & Agee, 1992, p. 419). Teaching college-level courses in international public relations is one of the best avenues for preparing public relations staffs for global business challenges.

Another rationale for an international public relations course is the accelerating pace of societal and technological change today. These changes call for adaptations in academic curricula and professional development programs. The increasing interdependence of nations today also calls for new public relations curricula aimed at educating staffs that can understand and meet increasing international social, economic and political complexities and challenges. On this point, Brody (1985a) noted that:

All these societal and technological changes are creating expanded knowledge and skill requirements for entry-level public relations practitioners. These conditions increasingly bring into question the relative applicability of contemporary undergraduate curricula and professional development programs to the practice needs of both students and potential employers (p. 28).

Brody (1985a) asked: "How should undergraduate public relations curriculum be constituted? What skills or bodies of knowledge should the practitioner assimilate before beginning practice?" (p. 28). Part of the answer to these questions lies in designing public relations curricula that include international courses at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. The public relations practice cannot advance unless new ideas are tested and practiced.

The need for international courses in public relations

education becomes clear in light of U.S. students' inadequate knowledge of world affairs as shown in several studies. A U.S. Presidential Commission, for example, found a dangerously inadequate understanding of world affairs among U.S. college students (American Council on Education, 1985). The obvious culprit is U.S. education, which Reischauer (1973) noted "is not moving rapidly enough in the right direction to produce the knowledge about the outside world and the attitudes toward other peoples that may be essential for human survival within a generation or two" (p. 4). Consequently, "a sizable percentage [of U.S. college students] doesn't seem to know the difference between Nigeria and Nicaragua, doesn't know that Mexico is to the south of the United States and Canada to the north . . ." (Brownlee, 1988, p. 17). This problem can be addressed by exposing students to courses with international foci, thus raising their knowledge of world markets (Steilen, 1988) and guarding against the tendency to be too myopic in college (Staples, 1988).

The need for international courses in public relations is demonstrated further by the growing global recognition of public relations degree programs and education, a phenomenon that Cantor (1985) predicted more than eight years ago.

One of the countries that have now recognized the importance of a degree program in public relations is the United Kingdom. On October 2, 1989, the Dorset Institute, a vocational college and one of about 30 polytechnic schools in England, became the

first college in Great Britain and Northern Ireland to offer an undergraduate program in public relations ("U.K. Tests First," 1989). In Brazil, entry into public relations requires a university degree in public relations and a professional license (Sharpe, 1992). And, in the Netherlands, one is required to pass a written examination before practicing public relations.

In addition, there is a growing global recognition of a need to expand courses within the public relations sequence to include more specialized topics, a point emphasized by University of Miami president, Edward T. Foote II. He said, "The need is great for broadly educated professionals in the expanding fields of communication" (cited in Lehrman, 1985). This concern was iterated by Sharpe (1985): "Professionals and educators alike must realize that, at the undergraduate level of education, the emphasis must remain on the acquisition of . . . [a] broad range of course-work that enables an individual to function effectively in society" (p. 29). The specialized courses include public relations writing, media publicity, public relations management, business communication, public relations principles and design-and-publications methods. Regrettably, most curricula do not include semester-long, regularly taught courses in international public relations.

Certain changes in the global economy also underscore the thesis of this paper. One may observe, for example, that changes in the product and financial markets in the past quarter of a century have led to increases in cross-border investments,

external financial markets, openness of most economies to international influences, the emergence of the newly industrialized nations, particularly those of the Pacific Rim, and, for the U.S. manufacturing sector, an increasing awareness of export possibilities (Aggarwal, 1987; Ernst, 1990; Borrus, Zellner, & Holstein, 1990). Other trends suggest global possibilities for U.S. companies: companies that do business abroad expect their outside revenues to grow from 22 percent to more than 25 percent in sales during the next five years, about 40 percent of such companies expect their non-U.S. production to grow by at least 25 percent during the same period, and about 60 percent expect to acquire foreign firms (Steingraber, 1990). In each of the past three years, for example, the Coca Cola Company and General Motors Corporation made more profits overseas than in the United States (Farinelli, 1990).

These trends have, in turn, contributed to the growth of global public relations: public relations agencies have discovered and moved into overseas markets, encouraging the development of an international perspective on their activities; the trend toward globalization of the media has created a broader audience reach; and the practice has experienced increased sophistication and growth overseas (Booth, 1986; Crespy, 1986). Further, corporate management now assigns top-level responsibilities to practitioners because of management's greater understanding of their potential for contributing to organizational well-being and social responsibilities.

Additionally, the far-reaching changes in the global economy, the increasing urgency of global environmental issues, and the increasing trend toward market forces as a method for democratizing national economies suggest that public relations can play a crucial role in the adjustment of businesses to new realities.

Beyond the business organization per se, public relations practitioners have been known to help modify the behavior of people and active groups by stimulating the flow of knowledge worldwide, by fostering mutual understanding through dialogue and consensus, and by helping people understand one another better (Modoux, 1989). How, then, can future practitioners be prepared in college for these continuing challenges?

A recent review of the coverage of international content indicates that authors of college-level public relations textbooks "have not yet realized the growing importance of international public relations and thus deal only very marginally with" it ("How College Textbooks," 1990). On the basis of all these factors we suggest that new curricula equip beginning college-graduate practitioners with the skills and knowledge for conducting effective global public relations. This emphasis on the undergraduate-level curriculum is based on the notion that entry-level public relations practitioners increasingly are graduates of public relations programs.

Scope of courses

Because public relations, in its ideal form, is a social scientific activity, it is influenced by a coalescence of environmental factors, a number of which are listed at the beginning of this paper. In Turkey, for example, practitioners' efforts to nurture organizational change is constrained by the absolute control that has been the prerogative of generations of historical rulers (Sharpe, 1992).

Similarly, Simões (1992) defines public relations in Latin America as a political function for organizations. "Whoever possesses information," writes Simões (1992), "automatically has control over the social, cultural, economic, and political transactions, inherent [in] the life of the organizations (p. 195).

Sriramesh (1992) links the public relations practice to India's cultural idiosyncracies. Sriramesh (1992) reports the emergence of a domineering dominant coalition that controls most of an organization's processes and manipulates the organization's environment rather than cooperate with it. Similarly, Al-Enad (1990) describes public relations in the Third World as driven by a living rule of public be damned, as geared toward propaganda, and as exploited by government and private institutions both to react to and to rigger positive changes in society.

For Australia, geography is the overarching factor in the public relations practice: isolation from world population centers has nurtured modern communications and public relations

industries (Thomson, 1989).

These disparate environmental influences on the practice cannot be ignored in public relations' pedagogy. In light of these influences and in light of the growing importance of international competition and the profound implications of public relations' role for organizations' competitive advantage in the international marketplace, it is suggested that, broadly, international public relations courses should:

- ▶ introduce students to the history and development of public relations in other cultures.
- ▶ acquaint students with the practice and function of public relations abroad, emphasizing differences between U.S. and non-U.S. practices.
- ▶ describe the internal and external dynamics of multinational corporations as well as the problems and difficulties of U.S. corporate public relations abroad, particularly in those countries where major U.S. corporations do business.
- ▶ introduce comparative legal, political and ethical dimensions of public relations practice at home and abroad.
- ▶ describe the history, organization, practice and professional operations of the media—a major public relations agenda item—abroad (with special attention to press clubs, press councils, press codes, etc.).³
- ▶ analyze the public relations aspects of major international political, diplomatic, cultural and

socioeconomic developments with special emphasis on superpower relations and regional bilateral cooperation.

► describe the various international organizations, associations and agencies that provide resources for public relations practitioners, particularly those regularly involved in the global dimension of their activities. Such organizations may include Amnesty International, the International Association for Medical Assistance to Travelers, the International Organization of Journalists and other media contacts abroad.⁴

Graduates of AEJMC-accredited programs, now fewer than those of communication program that are not governed by the AEJMC Accreditation board, are required to have a minimum of 90 semester credit hours outside of journalism and mass communication. (A survey of public relations programs in the United States indicates that public relation offerings have moved toward communication departments—away from journalism departments [Neff, 1992].) No fewer than 65 of those hours should be in liberal arts and sciences. Because of such requirements, such programs could, at the minimum, encourage their students to take an international course as an elective. At the graduate level, such a course may well be taken as a "Public Relations Specialty Option."

On the other hand, major aspects of such an international course could be integrated into existing courses by dropping less important aspects of the latter courses. A number of MBA programs include the international aspects of public relations in

their courses. Whatever their academic homes, such courses are needed to understand the broad function of public relations.

An attempt to incorporate international issues into the public relations curriculum of a Midwestern university was made in the fall of 1986, when the second author taught a new, semester-long course titled "International Public Relations," which was well received by the students.

Conclusion

Recent global developments point to a crucial need for expanded U.S. public relations curricula. Some of these developments are the pervasiveness of technologies for use in public relations, particularly the increasing capabilities of satellite communication; the increasingly transnational nature of business; the restructuring of the European Economic Community in 1991; the fast-changing political structure, particularly in Eastern Europe.

Are public relations practitioners and students up to the challenge? Bourke (1990), chairman and chief executive officer of Reynolds Metals Company, answers that question: "For the public relations professional, this means having a global outlook and the imagination to look beyond national borders for communications programs that help achieve business goals" (p. 40). Similarly, public relations consultant Epley (1992) notes:

It seems to me that we need to combine the best teaching of both worlds so that the next generation of practitioners

will be more effective than we are today.

In our profession, overcoming language and cultural nuances will continue to be perhaps our greatest challenge. Tragically, too many Americans fail to recognize the unique cultural diversities within even their own communities and country. (p. 114)

Students--tomorrow's practitioners--need to be equipped with a broad knowledge of the world. For public relations students, this requires a study of the history, developments and public relations practices, not just in the United States, but in other societies as well. A number of U.S. programs are revamping and improving their programs with the intent of addressing just these needs. However, they would do well to better prepare public relations students for complex and rapidly changing international business and governmental environments by offering courses in international public relations in their programs.

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Footnotes

1. For an analysis of Salzburg University's graduate courses in public relations, see Signitzer (1987).
2. For an analysis of U.S. firms' handling of public relations for Nigerian governments, see Davis (1977).
3. On the need for public relations practitioners to have knowledge of the media in other countries, Carr (1989) said, With more U.S. companies than ever now doing business with the Japanese, chances are increasing that you'll soon need to work with the Japanese media. (p. 27)
4. For information on some of the more important institutions that provide contacts with international media in the United Kingdom, Canada, Switzerland, Italy, Mexico, Asia and Africa, see Caruba (1984).